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ABSTRACT

Because of its hierarchical notation, the Dewey Decimal Classification is advantageous for machine searching. However, the increased volume of topics in recent years has made recoding in the system necessary. Education, for example, is a rapidly changing field, and the Dewey Decimal Classification system has not kept pace. As a result subject access to some education literature can be frustrating. It is expected that the forthcoming Edition 19 will do much to overcome the present shortcomings. (WBC)

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Subject Access to Education Literature
Dewey Decimal Classification

by

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The Library of Congress

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Melvil Dewey devised his Decimal Classification primarily for use in catalogs and only secondarily for use in shelf arrangement of books and documents. However, through the years, with the triumph of the dictionary catalog and the use of specific subject headings, the North American acceptance of the Dewey system has come more and more to be for shelf use, though in many other lands, notably, for instance, the United Kingdom, it has had wide use in classed catalogs. Only recently, with the development of MARC and other machine-readable systems, has it become appreciated in the U.S.A., largely through the studies of John Carson Rather, that the Decimal Classification, because of its hierarchical notation, presents certain very real advantages as a basis for machine searching, particularly for broad subjects.

It may be said, therefore, that Dewey's credentials as an avenue for access to education literature carry some considerable weight.

Education is the social science that deals with the process of providing or acquiring knowledge, skill, competence, desirable qualities of behavior or character through formal instruction, training, study.

We must think of education in the context of the social sciences, of which it is one of the most important. Certain aspects of various other social science disciplines are built into Dewey's education schedule, which in some instances eliminates the need to consult other schedules.

First, let us look at a general breakdown of the education section. We start out with general education at 370. Here we find applied to the discipline as a whole such general principles as philosophy, psychology, and sociology. This development keeps most publications in 370, not forcing us to place them in other areas of the classification system.

At 370.7 we have a special expansion on what we might call education in education. This development has been set forth to show those special aspects of the study and teaching of the discipline of education that are not brought out by the use of regular standard subdivision 07; for example, practice teaching at 370.733.

371 presents in array in subdivisions .1-.8 most of the general principles of education. These subdivisions are then used to show the same principles applied to specific levels of education under their respective numbers, 372 for elementary education, 373 for secondary education, 374 for adult education, and 378 for higher education. 375 is used for curriculums. If, for example, we have a work on elementary school teaching we class it in 372.1102, a composite number built from the number for general principles of education at the elementary level, 372.1, plus the appropriate subdivision from 371, i.e., 371.102.

At 371.9 we have special education, which is a subdiscipline of its own. We define special education as education of people who have abnormal physical, mental, or social differences. Every aspect of special education, regardless of level, is classed at the appropriate subdivision of 371.9.

The section 376, education of women, has created some controversy. Even before the advent of the women's liberation movement, it was felt that this number should be eliminated because education of women should not be given different treatment than is given education in general or education of men; education should be thought of as a totality. However, the amount of literature being placed in this number is on the wane. Most works nowadays are on specific women's schools or colleges, and are classed in 372, 373, or 378 with the various levels.

At 377, schools and religion, we are able to show schools supported by Christian and other groups, and we also have a provision for showing the interaction between schools and religion, such as prayer in the schools at 377.1.

At 379 we have education and the state. This includes regulation, control, and support of public education. In previous editions education and the state was classed at 350.85 for the public administration aspects, but now all material of that nature is classed in 379. However, 379 is not yet developed as fully as we would like to make specific provision for all our needs.

Inasmuch as we may add standard subdivision 07 to the number for any specific subject being studied or taught, the study and teaching of specific subjects takes us outside the education schedule. For example, a work on study and teaching of the social sciences beyond the elementary level will be found at 300.7. However, study and teaching at the elementary level does not use standard subdivision 07, but is classed in 372, e.g., a work on study and teaching of the social sciences at a level below high school will be classed in 372.83044. Nevertheless, we do not any longer class elementary textbooks on a specific subject with elementary education, but rather with the appropriate subject; for example, a textbook for elementary school use dealing with the general history of the United States in all periods is now classed in 973 in the same manner as we would class textbooks on U.S. history for secondary and higher levels, or general treatises on the subject.

Before we go further, let us point out that what immediately follows deals with weaknesses of the present, 18th edition, text, and then we shall try to explain what is being done to improve the situation.

The Dewey Decimal Classification has not always kept pace with the rapidly changing field of education. As it now stands, subject access to some education literature can be frustrating for both the classifier and the patron. Many works have been misplaced, simply because there is no named provision for their subjects. Some of the terminology in the schedule is out of date, and violates the principles, views, and theories of modern educators.

For many subjects numerous aspects are spelled out, and we can get to them either with the aid of the index or through direct consultation of the schedules. On the other hand many are not. For example, the general aspects of differentiated staffing would be classed at 371.14, with organization of the teaching force, while writing of behavorial objectives is usually a part of the lesson plan and must be classed with lesson plans and planning at 371.3.

Definitions, scope notes, synonyms, instruction notes, cross references, and other useful devices indicate what should be included under specific headings. However, under many of the categories there are not enough subdivisions giving separate provision for specific subtopics; for example, we may have a work on controversy surrounding a headstart program, for which there is no separate number, and find ourselves compelled to class it with general works on preschool institutions. We may have a work on the Montessori method of education, but we can class it only with its broad category as a method of instruction in 372.13.

We lack specific provision for such current topics as the school without walls, the open classroom, and middle schools. Depending on the emphasis we class the school without walls with types of schools or with teaching methods. The open classroom is confined to the elementary level, and our problem with it has been whether to treat it as a method of instruction (which we have done) or as an aspect or grouping for instruction. The idea behind the middle school today is that it provides a haven for the elementary school graduate who is not emotionally or otherwise ready for junior high school. The middle school is beyond the elementary level but not yet at the junior high level. We have classed the concept at 373.236, which is the number for the lower level of secondary schools, of which junior high schools are an example.

One of our more vexing problems at this point has been our inability to twist the schedules to make adequate provision for the classification of vocational education.

Many new concepts and innovations in education leave us with no precise place for proper classification. As for changes in terminology, one suggestion has been that at 371.967, instead of "socially and culturally deprived", the text should say, "socially and culturally different." Another concept that has created problems is behavior modification. We have no specific number for this, and have to treat the subject according to the material at hand; with educational psychology in 370.15 and 370.152, and also with teaching in 371.102.

We are often confronted with the problem of making distinctions among further education, higher education, and adult education. The phrase continuing education is used interchangeably with adult education. Stemming from this we have the problem of further education. In general we class this with adult education at 374. However, we must make the distinction as to whether further education should be thought of as adult education or as higher education (378). Adult education includes kinds of educational activity that are primarily remedial. Continuing education suggests formal educational activity that cannot be carried on at an earlier age.

Whenever the granting of a degree is involved we go outside adult education and class with higher education. Some colleges and universities have evening courses set up for those who cannot attend day school; however, they are in pursuit of a degree, but acquiring it must be done on an extended basis. Consequently, this is considered higher education. Our classification schedules do not readily define those distinctions, so we are often confused as to which place is better for a particular title. What may appear to be adult could actually be higher education, and vice versa.

There are other subjects that are difficult to get to; for example, accountability might have many aspects and could hardly be indexed under all of them. The same is true of futurism, of sensitivity training, and of innovations in education. In addition, there are inconsistencies in classifying various subjects such as educational games, education of women, career education, school leaving age.

We can use the index to get to most of our education subjects; however, this is not always feasible because the schedules do not adequately provide for all subjects with which we are confronted. For example, if busing is dealt with as transportation of students, it should be classed in 371.87: or, if it is dealt with as a means to achieve desegregation or racial balance, it should be classed in 370.19342.

There are some terms that are not in the index, such as performance contracting, free schools, open schools, truancy; and some terms in which the educational aspects are not indexed, such as simulation and assessment.

Why, then, haven't we as editors made the necessary additions and changes that as classifiers we find wanting? There has been considerable demand, especially from Britain, for a phoenix, that is, a totally revised, schedule similar to the schedules for mathematics and law in the current, 18th, edition of Dewey, and that for sociology in the forthcoming 19th edition. This would enable us to rationalize and systematize the whole section, giving, for example, parallel treatment to education at the various levels. However, in education as elsewhere there are those librarians who object strenously to changes in shelf classification on economic grounds, saying that new subjects should just be fitted as best they can within the existing archaic framework. Obviously we cannot completely restructure more than a few sections in any one edition, else our users would be confronted by an impossible task of assimilation, and always there are other sections that cry even louder than education for phoenix treatment.

However, we can now happily assure you that Edition 19, due probably in 1979, will make up for nearly all the lacks and shortcomings just described. It will include a great deal of new terminology and many new concepts, but only three or four relocations. I wish we could have gone further faster, but the inherent conservatism of Dewey users, especially for shelving purposes, has been an inhibiting factor.

The knowledge explosion of course has affected all aspects of librarianship; however, we feel that the proliferation of materials has affected classification more than it has many other library operations. We have a prescribed system of classification which we are to apply to the literature. Not only is the literature vast but there are new concepts that make it a scramble to keep up to date. A field like education experiences change each day and it is not feasible for us constantly to change our schedules. Yet we must develop them to avoid limitations. We must develop them in such a way that we can handle most of the literature in a fairly accurate manner without making mind-bending and heart-breaking decisions on too many titles.